



**Health Department**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## ***Milwaukee Health Department Conducting Investigation of Human Illness Linked to Prairie Dogs***

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) along with the State of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) is conducting an investigation associated with persons who have become ill after handling prairie dogs sold as pets at select pet store outlets in Milwaukee County.

The MHD investigation was initiated after persons who handled the animals during their distribution, delivery, sale or veterinary examination became ill with symptoms including fever, cough, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes and rash. These cases of human illness appear to involve persons who directly handled prairie dogs or possibly other small mammals that exhibited disease or were visibly sick. In addition, all of the animals believed to be linked to the human cases of illness appear to be part of a single shipment of prairie dogs obtained by a local distributor out of state in early May.

The MHD is contacting local pet store and suppliers of prairie dogs and other exotic mammals to determine the extent of the distribution of the above shipment of animals and subsequent sale to the general public. In addition, the MHD is asking that any persons in Milwaukee County who have purchased a prairie dog that has become sick in the last month OR if they have experienced illness after coming into contact with a prairie dog that has been sick to call the department at 414-286-3606. Outside of Milwaukee County, persons can call their local Health Department or the State of Wisconsin Division of Public Health at 608-266-2154.

The current investigation is limited to only those pet stores and persons who have either purchased or handled visibly sick animals in the past month. The MHD will continue to provide updates to local healthcare providers, veterinarians and the general public as new and pertinent information becomes available.

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